



Minerals Management Service

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MMS Initiates Oil and Gas Leasing Process for Offshore Virginia

Initial information-gathering steps begin for proposed Sale 220

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The Minerals Management Service (MMS) has taken the first step in the multi-year leasing process to hold a sale for acreage offshore Virginia. The Call for Information and Interest/Nominations and Notice of Intent (Call/NOI) to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will be published in the November 13th *Federal Register*, beginning a 45-day public comment period.

The purpose of the Call/NOI is to gather information to use for planning and analysis and does not indicate a preliminary decision to hold a lease sale. The final decision will be made at a later date only if the sale is in compliance with applicable laws including all requirements of the OCS Lands Act and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

“At the request of the Governor, MMS included the area offshore Virginia based on the Commonwealth’s current energy policy and continued interest in knowing what resources may be off its coastline,” said MMS Director Randall Luthi. The sale, referred to as Lease Sale 220, is proposed to be held in 2011.

The area offshore Virginia was initially included in the *Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program: 2007-2012* but leasing was prohibited due to an Executive withdrawal and a Congressional moratorium. In July 2008, President Bush lifted the withdrawal and the Congressional moratoria expired on September 30, 2008. Both of these actions allowed the option of the special interest lease sale.

“The EIS will evaluate environmental resources and potential impacts in this part of the mid-Atlantic, an area that has not held a lease sale since 1983,” said Luthi. “Throughout the scoping process for the EIS, Federal, state, and local governmental agencies, along with all other interested parties, have the opportunity to aid MMS in determining the significant issues and alternatives for analysis in the EIS we are preparing under NEPA.”

Currently, the area offshore Virginia being considered for leasing includes a 50-mile buffer and a no-obstruction zone from the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay, as requested by the Governor. As with any sale, the public will have multiple opportunities for input into the sale process.

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